



‘Ornament and Splendour’: shops and shopping in Georgian Dublin

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IN 1805, USING ‘QUANG-TCHU’ AND ‘PEKIN’ AS CODE FOR DUBLIN AND LONDON, THE Irish barrister John Wilson Croker described the shops of the Irish capital in scathing terms:

If we are to form our judgments from the number of their shops, the Quang-tcheuese are some of the richest people in the world; if we argue from what these shops profess to contain, they would be the most elegant and tasteful, but the truth is, they are neither one nor the other. [There is] ... a profusion of fine things ... at their windows ... but ... the show is always the same ... this stationary splendour is not a certain proof of great riches or refined taste, and in truth the best of their warehouses are those which sell you, at secondhand and at double price, the fineries and luxuries of Pekin.¹

Others were more positive, comparing Dame or Grafton streets to London’s Bond Street. A study of shops and shopping in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Dublin, focusing on fashionable consumption at a time of political and economic upheaval, suggests that the truth lay somewhere between these extremes. Whereas much scholarship now surrounds English retail history, little has been published on shops and shopkeeping in Georgian Ireland.² Architectural historians (notably Edward McParland, Christine Casey, Niall McCullough and Murray Fraser) have considered Dublin shop exteriors when writing about the Wide Streets Commissioners (formed in 1757), but shopping and shopkeepers have received little attention.³ In 2002, Hugh Douglas Hamilton’s *Cries of Dublin* came to light (a remarkable set of vignettes of hawkers and traders from 1760), and historians have reconstructed local fairs and markets with some success so that the

1 – Interior of 30 Westmoreland Street in 1976
(photo by David Davison; courtesy Irish Architectural Archive)

humbler levels of Irish retailing have recently come into sharper focus.⁴ The late Desmond FitzGerald, Knight of Glin, was pioneering in his recognition of the importance of trade cards, accounts and newspaper advertisements.⁵ Toby Barnard, drawing on a multitude of disparate archival sources to build up a richly nuanced picture of the ‘world of goods’, gives us the best possible context for fashionable retail and consumption before 1760.⁶

Secondary sources on English shops and shopkeepers offer a useful framework for approaching the Dublin shop. Hoh-Cheung and Lorna Mui have shown that growth of fixed-shop retailing, as well as many innovations formerly attributed to Victorian entrepreneurs, took place in England well before 1800.⁷ The most upmarket eighteenth-century English retailers certainly used design and display to entice their customers: as early as the 1720s, Daniel Defoe commented on gilding, painting and carving in high-class pastry shops.⁸

Irish shop interiors and their fittings have rarely survived in any form, although their façades appear on billheads and physical traces of terraced shops remain on twenty-first century Dublin streets. One trade label, for ‘I&R Sheilds of Stafford Street, Auctioniers, Fancy Upholstery and Cabinet Ware house’, shows an elaborate neoclassical scheme, but this is almost certainly an idealised representation of a drawing room.⁹ Few bothered to record their impressions when inside a Dublin shop, but George Cooper, horrified by the glamour of Dublin’s lottery offices in 1799, declared:

The public streets of Dublin are filled with lottery-offices, beyond the conception even of a Londoner. These shops are adorned with every thing which can catch the eye, and delude the mind of the unwary. They are furnished with the most gaudy trappings; are generally papered with green and gold, and lighted up with a profusion of the most expensive cutglass chandeliers and girandoles, which throw the streets at night into a blaze, and glitter with a brilliancy which cannot fail of surprising a stranger.¹⁰

AXES OF CONSUMPTION:

DUBLIN’S NEWLY WIDENED SHOPPING STREETS

The gowns were silk; but being purchased in Plunket Street, they were not properly cut for the fashionable hoop ... her buckles had been purchased at Crampton Court that morning ... they were the true Birmingham metal, and took up as much space in the shop, as the space generally allotted to an overgrown turnip ... Jenny contented herself with a pair bought on Ormond Quay.¹¹

IN 1782, THIS SATIRE ON THE ATTEMPTS AT FASHIONABILITY BY A GROCER’S FAMILY USED the locations of shops as an index of style. Clearly, a street name alone could act as shorthand for the worldly Dubliner by this date. Edel Sheridan-Quantz has written about three key ‘axes of fashionable consumption’: Castle Street and High Street; Capel,

Henry and Mary Streets; and Parliament Street, Dame Street, College Green and Grafton Street, the focus of this essay.¹² To reconstruct the geography of fashionable consumption in late-eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Dublin, a range of primary evidence – domestic account books, newspapers, novels, trade cards, diaries and letters – has been pressed into service. Unfortunately, few Dublin shops or businesses saw the point of preserving, or depositing, their papers.

The development of Dublin's smart shopping areas is intertwined with the well-known Wide Streets Commissioners' project referred to by Lord Lieutenant Rutland as 'the Plans adopting for advancing the Improvement of the Metropolis, calculated not more for Ornament and Splendour than for Health, Convenience and Security'.¹³ Visitors often described Dublin in equally glowing, albeit vague or generic terms, so that individual shops and their contents remain shadowy.¹⁴ Parliament Street, the Commissioners' first new thoroughfare, was laid out by 1762. Malton's 1790s watercolours and Shaw's *Dublin City Directory* of 1850 show the uniformity of its terraced shops, whose proportions and scale are similar to those in English cities at the time.¹⁵ Dominated by largely Protestant goldsmiths, mercers, drapers, haberdashers, cutlers, tailors and hatters, Parliament Street offered the Dublin consumer a modern and luxurious shopping experience: 'For regularity, elegance of architecture, and grandeur of the shops, this street is in no way inferior to the best trading street in London; the new Exchange forms a fine termination to the South, and Essex Bridge to the North.'¹⁶ The draper Thomas Collins at 14 Parliament Street, offering new silks in 1777, added: 'N.B. the Ladies will please to observe, that by purchasing at his House, they will avoid the great Inconvenience attending their shopping in narrow, disagreeable Streets, as the Approaches to Parliament-street are open and easy of Access.'¹⁷

In 1777/78, the Commissioners started planning the widening of Dame Street between Cork Hill and College Green, and from 1782 to 1784 new blocks, with shops at street level, were constructed between Palace Street and George's Lane. Between 1785 and 1790 a similar block was set between George's Lane and Trinity Street, much of which remains today (Plate 2).¹⁸ The inclusion of stone arches, quoins and ornaments

2 – Henry Aaron Baker, *ELEVATION OF PART OF THE NEW BUILDINGS, DAME STREET (south side), 1785*
(courtesy Dublin City Library and Archive)



incurred additional building costs, and the Commissioners were obliged, after legal action, to compensate owners accordingly.¹⁹ Newspapers of the late 1770s and early 1780s afford glimpses of the upheaval.²⁰ Barnaby O'Reilly moved from 21 to 68 Dame Street, where 'his ware-room for MEN'S MERCERY is laid out upon a VERY EXTENDED PLAN, after the manner in Paris'. He also got extra value from his advertisement by seeking an apprentice, and adding: 'Two handsome counters and shelves to be disposed of and a Quantity of old Sashes, Doors and other old materials'.²¹ Presumably these could then be recycled for use by a more humble outlet.

The northern side of Dame Street was completed by the mid 1790s, and a few years later it made a good impression on an English visitor to the city:

of a great width, and being filled with elegant shops of various descriptions, [it] forms one of the most accustomed and amusing lounges in the city of Dublin; where, from the groups of elegant women constantly passing and repassing, and the numerous parties of military officers from the barracks (*foraging in fruit shops*) it bears a strong resemblance to the London Bond Street.²²

After 1782, the constant support of both Westminster and the Castle had helped the Wide Streets Commissioners increase their powers. Aesthetic considerations became more important as the composition of the commission itself changed, and architects were brought in to design elevations. Several well-travelled connoisseurs and patrons of the arts became Commissioners: William Burton-Conyngham, Frederick Trench, John Beresford, Andrew Caldwell and Lord Carlow.²³ In 1785 it was resolved to continue Sackville Street to the river, along the line and width of the existing widened residential stretch, and James Gandon was invited to prepare elevations. These proposals incorporated shops at ground-floor level, but this combination met with opposition in Parliament, no sites were sold, and Gandon's designs were not executed.²⁴

Barnaby O'Reilly's claim in 1783 that his new shop at 68 Dame Street followed a Parisian plan may have been merely a typical 'puff'. However, McParland has shown that the Wide Streets Commissioners were certainly looking at European exemplars, citing this inscription on a 1787 map: 'The style of buildings proposed here has long been in use on the continent, and found uncommonly convenient in procuring bed chambers contiguous to shops or the apartments of persons in trade, unconnected with the upper floors.'²⁵ In 1787, the *Freeman's Journal* praised the 'ingeniously contrived' arrangement of residential floors above shops in Parisian apartment buildings: 'by this means ... the families or shopkeepers have the rooms immediately over the shops to themselves, and the best rooms are let to lodgers and their servants, who have no connexion with the family.'²⁶ This use of ground-floor shops as a compositional element in a uniform terraced façade has been described by Murray Fraser as 'a notable but rare example of the flow of French neo-classical ideas into Ireland without having first been passed through the work of architects in Britain'.²⁷ In 1789, elevations presented by Thomas Sherrard, surveyor to the Commission, still incorporating shops at ground-floor level and reminiscent of the

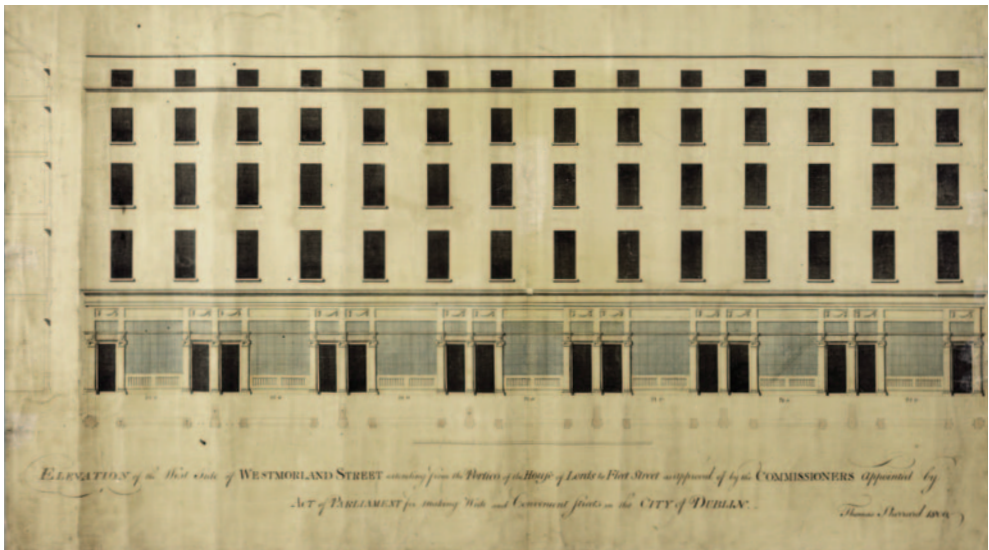


3 – Henry Aaron Baker

SKETCH OF A DESIGN FOR NEW SHOPFRONTS INTENDED FOR WESTMORELAND STREET, 1799

4 – Thomas Sherrard, ELEVATION OF THE WEST SIDE OF WESTMORELAND STREET
EXTENDING FROM THE PORTICO OF THE HOUSE OF LORDS TO FLEET STREET, 1800

(both illus courtesy Dublin City Library and Archive)



Dame Street scheme, were accepted for Sackville Street.²⁸ Two years later, a visitor enthused that Sackville Street ‘has not its parallel for beauty in all London. It is by far the finest street I ever saw, of great length, exceedingly broad, and handsomely built. On a Sunday evening there is a promenade, and we found it so crowded, that on one side there was hardly room to move.’²⁹

The French war intervened, and little money was available to the Commissioners until 1799. Westmoreland Street and D’Olier Street, the new streets south of Carlisle Bridge (designed by Gandon in 1791-95), were slow to be built and to sell, as the upheavals of 1798 and the passing of the Act of Union affected the property market. After a new Club House tax was imposed, with proceeds to the Wide Streets Commissioners, it was possible to resume work on these streets. In 1799, the architect Henry Aaron Baker was asked to construct the new blocks either side of Westmoreland street ‘upon a Colonnade ... so as to form an extended piazza for the length of the street on either side’.³⁰ Baker’s proposed elevation for Westmoreland Street (Plate 3) and Sherrard’s elevations, as actually built, differ markedly. Baker’s first drawing, with the first floor extended out over the pavement and supported on Doric columns, is reminiscent of some Northern Italian towns, and prefigured the nineteenth-century extension of the rue de Rivoli in Paris. Sherrard’s design was chosen; it omitted the colonnade and bays above, but retained the proportions of the original (Plate 4). Without this colonnade – measuring fifteen feet on either side – Westmoreland and D’Olier streets were now ninety feet wide rather than sixty. The scale was not to everyone’s liking: one Dublin journalist complained of its ‘bleakness’ and ‘gloomy and monotonous aspect’.³¹ An Englishman who knew the city well took a more positive line:

Westmorland Street is by far the most elegant trading street in Dublin, and the most regular in the whole city; it is about 100 feet wide, and the houses built of bricks in a superb style, except the ground floor which is of hewn stone. They are exactly uniform not only in their height but in the exterior decoration of the shops. They are full 60 feet high, having five stories, and the ground story so lofty as to afford a gallery in every shop.³²

This ‘gallery’ refers to a mezzanine floor inspired by the spatial organisation of the typical Parisian shop interior, and an example of direct influence from France. In 1808, the *Freeman’s Journal* described the mezzanine as a ‘narrow gallery overlooking the shop, from which shop managers could keep check on the “eccentricities of apprentices and shop-men”’.³³

No original shopfronts remain on Westmoreland Street, although the granite dressings survive in sections, and 8 D’Olier Street was recently restored by the Irish Times.³⁴ Each shop had two doors arranged either side of a central window: one for customers and one for access to the living quarters overhead. The interior of 30 Westmoreland Street, however, was photographed in 1976, prior to its demolition (Plates 1, 5). Here, the mezzanine runs around three sides, with a striking Greek Revival cast-iron balustrade of



5 – Interior of 30 Westmoreland Street in 1976
 (photo by David Davison; courtesy Irish Architectural Archive)

anthemia and draped maiden ornaments.

Westmoreland Street and D'Olier Street, largely completed by 1805, predated similar street-planning elsewhere, notably Nash's Regent Street in London (1817-23). In this instance, Dublin was at the forefront of European design due to the enlightened approach of the Wide Streets Commissioners. These streets, designed in 1800, anticipated virtually every European street improvement of the nineteenth century: Nash's Regent Street, Napoleon III and Haussmann's Paris, and Cerda's Barcelona.³⁵ With the completion of these Dublin streets, fashionable shopping activity once more shifted a little further east, along the new avenues linking Dame Street and College Green with Carlisle Bridge and Lower Sackville Street. Westmoreland Street was dominated by textiles and fashion – hatters, hosiers, linen and woollen drapers, shoemakers and glovers. The more costly items available included jewellery, miniatures and imported ceramics.³⁶ By this date, Grafton Street was described as 'a sort of London Bond Street': jewellers, silversmiths, milliners, glovers, glass and china merchants offered both foreign and Irish luxury goods. Following the opening of Carlisle Bridge in 1795, Grafton Street was now on a new north-south axis and was redeveloped accordingly (although it did not receive the Commissioners' attention until 1841).³⁷ A billhead for Jackson china and glass warehouse on Grafton Street shows the impact which could have been created by window display.³⁸

As James Malton's famous *Views of Dublin* were probably completed in England, details of the individual Dublin shops illustrated may not be topographically accurate. The shops included in his *Views* are typical, however, in the use of panes of window glass as framing devices for goods, whether fruit, candles or drapery.

SWORDS, SKATES AND GREEN IVORY: READ'S OF PARLIAMENT STREET

DESIGN HISTORIAN CLAIRE WALSH ARGUES THAT IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY, English retailers used architecture and interior design to promote the shop. As only a very narrow range of goods was branded, it was the role of the shop to inform the customer about their stock; customers would be drawn to a particular shop because it could provide expert knowledge about the goods they wanted, and had the trade connections to obtain them. Thus, it was the shop rather than the individual item which was branded. The shop's reputation, signalled by its design, was therefore of paramount importance.³⁹ The stylish new retail premises opening along Parliament Street in the late 1760s were clearly aware of this. Most of these flat-fronted buildings – two bays wide, of four storeys above a ground-floor shop – have long since been remodelled, with one well-known exception.

John Read, cutler, opened 4 Parliament Street for business in 1767, having bought the premises from the Wide Streets Commissioners for £730 16s 8d in June 1762.⁴⁰ The Read family business seems to have originated in 1719, and the date of 1670, used to brand Read's as 'Dublin's oldest shop', remains unverified. It may refer to the start of an earlier cutlery business on Blind Quay, where the young James Read (c.1698-c.1744) was employed.⁴¹ He would have started there in 1719, and the business was probably taken over by him during the 1720s or 1730s after the death of his employer. Following the death of James Read, in about 1744, the business was taken over by his nephew, John Read (1717-1776), and in 1760 it moved to Crane Lane. Thomas took over on the death of his father, John, in 1776, and from 1808 the business was incorporated as Thomas Read & Company.⁴²

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Read's supplied swords, razors, surgical instruments and ice skates, as well as knives and forks, often with distinctive green-stained ivory handles (Plates 6, 7). Richard Jackson, chief secretary to the Lord Lieutenant, bought several dozen green ivory-handled knives and forks, as well as horse shears, from John Read between 1769 and 1772.⁴³ Green ivory handles were also fashionable in London at this time but seem to have been more popular with Irish cutlers and silversmiths, and for a longer period, than in London.⁴⁴ Most inventories and accounts mention green-handled cutlery, but usually without the name of the maker.⁴⁵ Richard Edgeworth purchased cutlery with green ivory handles from Hewetson of Crane Lane in 1755, proving that Reads did not have a complete monopoly.⁴⁶ By 1813, Thomas Read



6 – Nineteenth-century patten skates

7 – Pairs of knives and forks of bright polished steel, the blade stamped 'Reads', with green-stained ivory handles, c.1820-30

(both illus courtesy Thomas Read Trust)

of Parliament Street is listed as 'Surgical Instrument Maker, Knife and Sword Cutler'.

Read's shop retains the framework of some of the original ground-floor frontage, but plate glass windows have replaced the original design (Plate 8). The ground floor of 4 Parliament Street was originally made up of the usual 'front shop' and 'back shop', but the dividing wall was removed during structural works, perhaps at the very end of the eighteenth century. The mahogany joinery is of great interest, dating between 1765 and 1820.⁴⁷ The largest cupboards in Reads – running along the north wall – are best described as 'show glasses' (Plate 9). It has been established, using Court of Orphans inventories, that in England between 1690 and the 1730s, only goldsmiths' shops had this type of substantial glazed press, suited to the display of valuable goods. As glass became more affordable throughout the century, other shops slowly adopted the design.⁴⁸ No visual evidence has emerged for the interior of a London cutler's shop, but the English goldsmith's shop may have been a model for Read's; a trade card for Phillips Garden in London bears this out.⁴⁹ Glass-topped counters in luxury shops allowed a clear view of costly objects while offering some security. Matthew West, goldsmith, had this type of counter nearby at 15



Skinner Row.⁵⁰ The glass cases in 4 Parliament Street probably date from the nineteenth century, designed to match the 1760s counters on which they rest.

The shop's large 'compass-headed' cabinets, and the smaller cabinets with open swan-neck pediments, are in Dublin oral tradition 'real Chippendale' (Plate 10). However, while the design vocabulary is similar to Chippendale's *Director* of 1754, the gothic tracery on the larger glazed doors is identical to plate 49 in William Pain's *The Builder's Pocket Treasure* (1763). This would have been in circulation in Ireland by the late 1760s.⁵¹ As in a goldsmith's shop, the 'nest of drawers' was used to hold smaller, precious items and would once have been lined with costly velvet.

The cupboards and shelves further back towards the rear (east) wall of the shop appear to be of later construction, some *c.*1790, and others of early nineteenth-century date; the galleried clerk's area is likely to date to the 1820s. The interior was substantially remodelled in the 1790s, after Thomas Read's brother, John, left to set up at 8



*Interior of Thomas Read & Co, 4 Parliament Street
(photographed in 1983; courtesy Irish Architectural Archive)*

above 9 – Show glasses

opposite 8 – Compass-headed cupboards and glass counters

overleaf 10 – Cupboard with open swan-neck pediment

College Green, and another renovation seems to coincide with Thomas Read & Company's Royal Charter in 1821.⁵² The open shelves are sturdily constructed, timber bracketed and tied horizontally with steel bars, and there is evidence for folding and articulated doors, as the runners survive. This very practical design (given the constraints of space between counter and wall) would have required precise workmanship; combined with the sophistication of the design vocabulary, this suggests the work of a team of highly skilled cabinet-makers. As Toby Barnard has put it:



master craftsmen, insisting on what was practicable but keen to demonstrate their virtuosity, helped to determine what was erected. In this, they could demonstrate a discriminating fancy or taste, improved by handling imports, seeing engravings or pattern books and by themselves travelling.⁵³

As with the Dublin town house of the same period, questions arise regarding the standardisation, or otherwise, of Dublin's luxury shop interiors. If No. 4 is typical of the more prestigious premises being fitted out along Parliament Street and, later, Dame Street, Conor Lucey's suggestion that 'the tradesman or building "knot" involved in erecting and decorating speculative properties nevertheless emerge as important agents of fashion in their own right' offers food for thought.⁵⁴ With no other remaining interiors to examine, this must remain purely hypothetical, but the pace of building and fitting out shops on the newly widened streets in the last decades of the eighteenth century may have been

the catalyst for several teams of tradesmen to specialise in shop interiors of varying degrees of sophistication. Pain's *Builder's Pocket Treasure* (1763), full of precise diagrams and practical technical information, may well have been a key source. Clearly, then, both the interior and exterior of Read's cutlers are directly comparable to the smartest English shops of the 1760s. All these expensively made and visually rich mahogany and glass fittings would have been an expression of the financial standing of the shopkeeper, convincing the customer of his ability to provide expensive items to order and to manage long-term credit.

SOME ASPECTS OF SHOPPING IN DUBLIN

IT IS DIFFICULT TO RECONSTRUCT PRACTICES OF CONSUMPTION DURING THE EIGHTEENTH century, but as the goods being sold were not standardised at this time, a customer had to come to the shop to see what was in stock or send a servant to fetch a sample. There is evidence for a London goldsmith going to his customer's house, but this was a fairly rare occurrence.⁵⁵ As discussed above, there is little evidence for Irish shop interiors; English shop inventories often include chairs, upholstered in velvet or leather, as well as mirrors and paintings to add to the atmosphere of comfort and to detain customers. Going shopping was seen as a female preserve, and sometimes merely as a leisure pursuit. One English mercer complained that the ladies 'swim into my shop by shoals, not with the least intention to buy, but only to hear my silks rustle, and fill up their own leisure by putting me into full employment.'⁵⁶ However, historians such as Amanda Vickery, John Styles, Maxine Berg and Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace offer a more nuanced reading of the motivations and complexity of female consumption in eighteenth-century Britain and America.⁵⁷

Shoplifting was rife, and between 1780 and 1795 the *Hibernian Journal* reports over a hundred instances. The penalty was transportation, and in this period there were twenty-one convictions, about half of those tried. The lengths to which a practised thief could go to avoid detection are apparent in one case, tried in December 1785:

A woman entered a haberdashers in Grafton Street and examined fine lace on the counter, meanwhile keeping both hands crossed demurely over her heart. As she left, the shopkeeper realised a most valuable piece of lace had gone missing, as the lady 'was possessed of a third hand, of ... animation and dexterity'. One of her exposed hands had been a fake, concealed by a glove.⁵⁸

The newly widened streets afforded more room for ladies' carriages to halt outside shops and wait imperiously for the shopkeeper to come out and attend them. In 1790, a 'flight of English sharpers (they cruise, as they term it)' took advantage of this expectation:

Females of this gang go about shopping in genteel job carriages, and by requiring

shopkeepers to attend them in their coaches, as persons of distinction, facilitate the business of plunder. Several of those Ladies have driven a smart trade for some weeks in Dame Street, Capel Street, Grafton Street, etc. It is much to be wished that persons of fashion would not give that countenance to this species of robbers, which is inseparable from attending them in their coaches – a respect which is now the custom for traders to pay, in all weathers, to persons of genteel appearance.⁵⁹

‘BUCKISM AND EXTRAVAGANCE’:
PERCEPTIONS OF THE DUBLIN SHOPKEEPER

THERE WAS MUCH CRITICISM THROUGHOUT THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY OF ‘THE IMPROVIDENT disposition of the Dublin merchants, and shop-keepers, who live in great luxury and profusion’, and an English visitor in 1810 fulminated that

Luxury has made as great progress among people in business here, as in any other place I ever visited – A shop-keeper gives splendid entertainments, and his wife elegant routs, in which her own manner and appearance, that of the females she invites, and the costliness and embellishments of the furniture, would bear comparison with persons of a much higher rank; nor does her husband acquit himself with less propriety at the foot of his table, or in the drawing room.⁶⁰

The pretensions of shopkeepers were a frequent butt of satire.⁶¹ A letter from ‘Timothy Peascod, greengrocer’, laments that his family ‘is almost ruined by the article of dress’.⁶² In 1803, a Dublin diarist observed, after an evening at the theatre ‘squeezing in the lattices’, that:

It is curious to observe the rapid progress of Buckism and extravagance amongst the Shop keepers &c in Dublin; the Box at the play-house, the Rotunda & every place where money will procure admission are as regularly attended by the grocer’s Clerk as by the sprig of fashion, & frequently the external is very nearly equal; a general emulation to strut in fine cloaths pervades the lowest classes who can muster the means.⁶³

This critical tone betrays a degree of class anxiety, owing much to the related debate, from Swift and Berkeley onwards, about luxury and the national economy in eighteenth-century Ireland.⁶⁴ It also echoes the criticism of retailers in England throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁶⁵ It has been suggested that in England, one reason for the increased criticism of shopkeepers was the introduction of fixed-price retailing. Trade bargaining and credit practices were not immediately overruled, but fixed prices did become more common in England in the 1780s.⁶⁶ Irish shops soon followed suit, although change was slow. Advertisements from Dublin papers throughout the 1780s stress that items will be sold for ready money, but many account books of the period still settle

traders' bills in full at the end of the season, or at the end of December, showing that the new system was not in operation with known and trusted customers. Court evidence given in 1791 demonstrates that sending servants to collect samples and, later, goods from haberdashery shops, was still common practice in Dublin at that date.⁶⁷

DUBLIN MERCHANTS AND SHOPKEEPERS: CONFESSIONAL IDENTITIES

THE RELIGIOUS PROFILE OF THE MERCHANT AND TRADING POPULATION OF DUBLIN IS not entirely clear, but it can broadly be asserted that the majority of Dublin merchants, shopkeepers and craftsmen dealing in luxury goods were of the established, Anglican faith. For many, their loyalty to the British Crown was not incompatible with claiming to support economic nationalism and the independent Irish parliament established in 1782.⁶⁸

The lifestyle and fashion choices of Dublin shopkeepers are often satirised, but rarely described in positive terms. In 1801, an evening entertainment given by Protestant haberdashers at their Abbey Street home was described by a young broker's apprentice:

Miss Hamilton and Miss Moore are two ladies in the great and fashionable business as Lace and Muslin sellers etc with a good deal of money and well furnished house ... Miss Moore completely Amazonian, would admirably become the clothes of her brother the Major ... The party consisted of ... the Messrs Vignes, jewellers of College Green & beaus of the first water, to use a shop phrase in character, Miss Vigne ... not very genteel, but without affectation or hauteur & not ill informed, as I gathered from a tête à tête at an interval of dancing – a dissertation on the merits of Scotch and Irish music & of the dancing of different countries.⁶⁹

These intriguing characters can be identified tentatively as Mary Moore, linen draper of South King Street, and either Grace or Jane Hamilton, both haberdashers, of Jervis Street and Capel Street respectively. James Vigne had a jewellery shop at 27 College Green.⁷⁰

The Catholic minority among Dublin's retailers rarely dealt in expensive goods but did manage to run small shops and businesses despite the 'Popery' acts passed at the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth centuries, which had deprived them of property rights.⁷¹ As well as not having a vote, a Catholic could not take a lease of more than thirty-one years, was not allowed to become a freeman, and could only register as a quarter brother of a guild.⁷² A number of relief acts were passed in the last quarter of the century.⁷³ In order to qualify, however, an oath had to be sworn to 'permit his majesty's subjects of whatever persuasion, to testify their allegiance to him'.⁷⁴ The Catholic Qualification Rolls were destroyed in the Public Record Office fire of 1921, but a few index rolls have survived. Those for Dublin between 1778 and 1792 show that 1,250 names were registered, some just as merchants, others specifying a particular

trade.⁷⁵ These show that while many Catholics were general merchants, or grocers, far fewer were making or selling luxury goods. This was partly due to craft guild restrictions. The index rolls indicate that Catholic traders were concentrated in the old city centre, near Dublin Castle, the Royal Exchange and the old Custom House, and also in the Liberties, west of the old city walls.⁷⁶ Castle Street, Dame Street, and Parliament Street were predominantly Protestant.

Maureen Wall suggests that as most Catholics lived without ostentation in Dublin's poorer districts, their more modest lifestyle helped them become wealthy in spite of the popery laws. Catholics had fewer outgoings than their Protestant equivalents as they did not belong to guilds or attend 'city jamborees', and had no election costs to bear. Faced with the risk of being 'discovered' in breach of the Penal Laws, no Catholic wished to draw attention to themselves.⁷⁷ Writing of the lack of ostentation amongst the few prosperous Catholics earlier in the century, Barnard remarks: 'Instead, materialism, sometimes gross and destructive, was seen as the characteristic and curse of the nascent Protestant ascendancy.'⁷⁸ This assertion is borne out by the example of Protestant merchant William Cope (partner in prosperous silk wholesale business Cope, Binns, Hautenville & Downes), who moved from Dame Street to Merrion Square in 1788.⁷⁹ As profits fell in the 1790s, a clerical member of the Cope family counselled William that:

the Public Eye will now be upon us. Some attention should therefore be paid to exterior appearance. The Ostentatious establishment of Merrion Square ought to undergo a thorough reform and retrenchment. It was always unsuitable to our station and served only to excite envy but circumstanced now as we are it would now be to the last degree preposterous to continue it on its present foot.⁸⁰

William Cope considered the eventual bankruptcy of the firm in 1800 to be largely due to his opposition to the Catholic Emancipation Bill, although wider economic forces and the changing fashion from silk to cotton would also have played a part.⁸¹

Descendants of some French Huguenot immigrants became influential figures in Dublin's commercial circles – for example, the La Touche banking dynasty and the Hautenville family of silk merchants – while others with French surnames appear in directories as drapers and haberdashers: Chaigneau, Minchon, Brocas, Morlet. Others were part of a close-knit circle of Dublin Huguenot goldsmiths.⁸²

Members of the Society of Friends used their strong family links with England and the rest of Ireland to help them achieve domination in the wholesale wool trade, and by the early nineteenth century they were an important force.⁸³ Some of these merchant families had started as grocers – for example, the Bewleys and Jacobs. Few Friends were involved in the selling of luxury goods as such commodities were distinctly at odds with their espousal of plain living. But in 1809, a young American Friend, Margaret Harvey, was stunned by the finery of her husband's prosperous cousin Thomas Pim, a merchant living at 22 William Street:⁸⁴

How different the merchants live here from those in Philadelphia ... The dining parlour hung with crimson; every article of furniture mahogany. In the recesses are mahogany cases from the ceiling down to the surbase with glass doors lined with green silk. In one they keep books, in the other the china they use every day. A good contrivance, and gives the room with all a grand and elegant appearance.

[...] The drawing room is monstrous large – two sofas, twenty chairs, mahogany and cane mixed are the fashion here; two pier tables and one other, and still looks empty; a Turkey carpet covered all over with green baize; rich chintz curtains.⁸⁵

CONCLUSION

AS ‘SECOND CITY’ IN THE BRITISH ISLES, DUBLIN AS A PLACE FOR FASHIONABLE CONSUMPTION was often favourably compared to London and sometimes considered superior to the larger provincial English cities. While the gentry of the capital often looked to London and Paris for luxury items, Dublin shops remained an abundant source of goods, both fashionable and workaday, for many Dubliners. Shopkeepers, often criticised for being too fond of fine clothing, both sold and consumed a wide range of commodities, and while Protestants dominated luxury retail on the smartest streets, the proportion of Catholic merchants and shopkeepers slowly increased in the last decades of the eighteenth century.

The integration of shops at the ground-floor level of Parliament, Dame, D’Olier and Westmoreland streets brought commercial and social life together, and these broad thoroughfares became places of promenade as well as shopping areas. In the wake of the Wide Streets Commissioners’ redrawing of Dublin, newly built and glamorously outfitted shops such as Read’s of Parliament Street offered shoppers an environment of remarkable modernity in which to negotiate the world of goods.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

British Library; Dublin City Library and Archive; Dublin Friends Historical Library; Irish Architectural Archive; National Art Library, London; National Library of Ireland, Manuscripts Department; New York Public Library; Royal Irish Academy; Trinity College Manuscripts Department. Individual thanks to Toby Barnard; Mary Ann Bolger; Mary Clark; Helen Clifford; David Dickson; the late Mairead Dunlevy; the late Desmond FitzGerald, Knight of Glin; John FitzGerald; Roy Foster; David Griffin; Conor Lucey; Simon Moore; Anna Moran; Gillian Naylor; Kevin Rogers; John Styles; Ann Wilson; Claire Walsh. I would also like to acknowledge the Desmond Guinness Scholarship, and the Royal College of Art Basil Taylor Memorial Prize.

ENDNOTES

The following abbreviations are used:

FH	Dublin Friends Historical Library
NLI	National Library of Ireland
RIA	Royal Irish Academy
TCD	Trinity College Dublin

- ¹ J.W. Croker, *An Intercepted Letter from J.T. Esq. at Canton, 1804* (Dublin, 1805) 22-23 (initially published anonymously).
- ² See introduction, 'Historians and the Nation of Shopkeepers', in John Benson and Laura Ugolini (eds), *A Nation of Shopkeepers: five centuries of British retailing* (London & New York, 2003) 1-24.
- ³ Edward McParland, 'The Wide Streets Commissioners: their importance for Dublin architecture in the late 18th-early 19th century', *Quarterly Bulletin of the Irish Georgian Society*, XV, no. 1, 1972, 1-32; Murray Fraser 'Public Building and colonial policy in Dublin, 1760-1800', *Architectural History*, 27, 1985, 102-23; Christine Casey, *Dublin: the Buildings of Ireland III* (London and New Haven, 2005); Niall McCullough (ed.), *A Vision of the City: Dublin and the Wide Streets Commissioners* (Dublin, 1991); Niall McCullough, *Dublin, an Urban History* (Dublin, 2007). See also Anna Moran, 'Selling Waterford Glass in early nineteenth century Ireland', *Irish Architectural and Decorative Studies*, VI, 2003, 56-89; John Montague, 'A Shopping Arcade in eighteenth-century Dublin: John Rocque and the Essex Street "Piazas"', *Irish Architectural and Decorative Studies*, X, 2007, 224-45; and Anna Moran, 'Merchants and Material Culture in early nineteenth century Dublin: a consumer case study', *Irish Architectural and Decorative Studies*, XI, 2008, 140-65.
- ⁴ Hugh Douglas Hamilton, *The Cries of Dublin*, edited by William Laffan (Tralee, 2003); D.A. Cronin, J. Gilligan & K. Holton (eds), *Irish Fairs and Markets* (Dublin, 2001).
- ⁵ Knight of Glin, 'Dublin Directories and Trade Labels', *Furniture History*, 21, 1985, 258-72; Knight of Glin, 'Early Irish trade cards and other eighteenth century ephemera', *Eighteenth Century Ireland*, II, 1987, 115-32; Sarah Foster, 'Going shopping in Georgian Dublin: luxury goods and the negotiation of national identity', unpublished MA thesis, Royal College of Art (RCA), London, 1995.
- ⁶ Toby Barnard, *Making the Grand Figure: lives and possessions in Ireland 1641-1770* (London & New Haven, 2004). See also Moran, 'Merchants and Material Culture'; Alison FitzGerald, 'The business of being a goldsmith in eighteenth century Dublin', in Gillian O'Brien and Finola O'Kane (eds), *Georgian Dublin* (Dublin, 2008) 127-34.
- ⁷ Hoh-Cheung Mui and Lorna Mui, *Shops and Shop-keeping in eighteenth century England* (London, 1989). See also Claire Walsh, 'Shop design and the display of goods in eighteenth century London', *Journal of Design History*, 8, no. 3, 1995, 157-76, and Claire Walsh, 'Shop Design and the Display of Goods in the Eighteenth Century', unpublished MA thesis, RCA, 1993; Benson and Ugolini, *A Nation of Shopkeepers*.
- ⁸ Walsh, 'Shop design and the display of goods', 160. See also Nancy Cox and Karin Dannehl, *Perceptions of Retailing in Early Modern England* (Farnham, 2007).
- ⁹ The Knight of Glin and James Peill, *Irish Furniture* (London and New Haven, 2007) fig. 237.
- ¹⁰ George Cooper, *Letters on the Irish Nation, written during a Visit to that Kingdom in the Autumn of 1799* (London, 1800) 23.
- ¹¹ *Dublin Evening Post*, 21st September 1782.
- ¹² Edel Sheridan-Quantz, 'The multi-centred metropolis: the social topography of eighteenth-century Dublin', in Peter Clark and Raymond Gillespie (eds), *Two Capitals: London and Dublin 1500-1840*,

- Proceedings of the British Academy, 107 (Oxford, 2001) 280-83.
- ¹³ Quoted in Fraser, 'Public building and colonial policy', 114.
- ¹⁴ Gillian O'Brien, "'What can possess you to go to Ireland?': visitors' perceptions of Dublin, 1800-30", in O'Brien and O'Kane (eds), *Georgian Dublin*, 17-29.
- ¹⁵ For example, a 1793 trade card for Beeching, a linen draper in Tunbridge, is strikingly similar. See illustration 90 (courtesy of the Banks Collection, British Museum) in Walsh, 'Shop design and the display of goods'.
- ¹⁶ *Walker's Hibernian Magazine*, February 1783, 95.
- ¹⁷ *Freeman's Journal*, 14th-16th October 1777.
- ¹⁸ McCullough, *Dublin, an Urban History*, 134.
- ¹⁹ Casey, *Dublin*, 414
- ²⁰ McParland, 'The Wide Streets Commissioners', 7.
- ²¹ *Faulkner's Dublin Journal*, 1st-3rd May 1783. Entries in *Wilson's Street Directory* show that O'Reilly had moved from 21 Dame Street to 68 Dame Street between 1782 and 1783.
- ²² Nathaniel Jefferys, *An Englishman's Descriptive Account of Dublin* (London, 1810) 54-55.
- ²³ Edward McParland, 'Strategy in the planning of Dublin, 1750-1800' in Paul Butel and L.M. Cullen (eds), *Cities and Merchants: French and Irish perspectives on urban development, 1500-1900* (Dublin, 1986) 105.
- ²⁴ No drawings of these elevations are known to have survived. See Edward McParland, *James Gandon, Vitruvius Hibernicus* (London, 1985) 88.
- ²⁵ Edward McParland, 'Eclecticism: the provincial's advantage', *Irish Arts Review Yearbook*, 1991-92, 212.
- ²⁶ *ibid.*
- ²⁷ Fraser, 'Public building and colonial policy', 116. Possible Parisian models include Rue Childebert, Place Baudoyer and Cour d'Aligre. See McParland, *James Gandon*, 89.
- ²⁸ Maura Shaffrey, 'Sackville Street/O'Connell Street', *Irish Arts Review Yearbook*, 1988, 147.
- ²⁹ E.D. Clarke, *A Tour through the South of England, Wales and Part of Ireland during the Summer of 1791* (London, 1791) 319.
- ³⁰ Fraser, 'Public Building and Colonial policy', 118, citing Wide Streets Commissioners Minutes, 25th May 1799.
- ³¹ *Freeman's Journal*, 26th October 1808.
- ³² John Gough, *A Tour in Ireland in 1813 and 1814, with an Appendix written in 1816 on another visit to that island, by an Englishman* (London, 1817) 128. Gough had been visiting Ireland regularly since about 1780; *ibid.*, 121.
- ³³ Moran, 'Merchants and Material Culture', 150; *Freeman's Journal*, 26th October 1808.
- ³⁴ Casey, *Dublin*, 421; 418.
- ³⁵ Shaffrey, 'Sackville Street/O'Connell Street', 148.
- ³⁶ *Wilson's Dublin Directory* for 1807 shows Charles Robertson, miniature painter, at 29; Robert Roth, jeweller, at 30; Samuel Alker, China and glass seller, at 31. For Alker, see Moran, 'Merchants and material culture', 149-50, fig. 5.
- ³⁷ Casey, *Dublin*, 519.
- ³⁸ Moran, 'Merchants and material culture', 140, fig. 1.
- ³⁹ Walsh, 'Shop design and the display of goods', 1993.
- ⁴⁰ Dublin City Archives, Wide Streets Commissioners Minutes, Saturday 26th June 1762. Read was the highest bidder, at 34s a foot.
- ⁴¹ The Guild of St Luke, for cutlers, painter-stainers and stationers was chartered in 1670 (Chas. II, 4th

- October 1670).
- ⁴² Simon Moore, cutlery historian, via email 8th August 2012. *Wilson's Dublin Directory*, 1801. At present, the building is unoccupied but any valuable contents have been audited, batched and removed for safe keeping.
- ⁴³ TCD, MS 9218, Hon. Richard Jackson account book and visiting list, Dublin 1767-78.
- ⁴⁴ The National Museum of Ireland has a butter knife by Benjamin Tait (1788) and a fish slice by Christopher Haines (1797), both with green ivory handles. John Teahan, *Airgead Eireannach, Silver from the Kurt Ticher Collection* (Dublin, 1984) pls 35, 39. In 1770s London, green-stained ivory was only available from one supplier. Helen Clifford, pers. comm.
- ⁴⁵ For example, NLI, MS 9349, Balfour Mss: Accounts of Balfour family of Townley Hall, Co. Louth, 31 July 1772; NLI, MS 4481, Adlercron Mss., Mrs Meliora Adlercron, Household account book, Nov. 1786; NLI, MS 8035, Fingall Mss: 8th Earl; Some inventories, 5 March 1790.
- ⁴⁶ NLI, Edgeworth papers, MS 1522, 11 Dec. 1755, £1 13s for a 2nd set of green-stained ivory knives and forks with three prongs; MS 1527, p.68, 1761: Another dozen knives and forks, £1 12s and another appears in 1769, on p. 131 of NLI, MS 1535, at £1 14s 1½d. I am indebted to Toby Barnard for these references.
- ⁴⁷ I am grateful to Kevin Rogers, architectural historian, for discussion of eighteenth-century joinery.
- ⁴⁸ Walsh, 'Shop design and the display of goods', 71.
- ⁴⁹ Claire Walsh, pers. comm.
- ⁵⁰ 'The glass-case was locked in the middle, and hasped at one end, and she strained the sash to get in her hand'. Matthew West v Mary Lloyd in V. Dowling, *Trials at Large* (Dublin, 1792) 149.
- ⁵¹ See pl. 49 of William Pain, *The Builder's Pocket Treasure* (1763) for similar tracery on a fanlight. See also Desmond FitzGerald, 'Nathaniel Clements and some eighteenth century Irish houses', *Apollo*, 1966, 317.
- ⁵² Royal Charter awarded 1821, cutlery and surgical instrument manufacturer to Royal Household and His Majesty's Forces in Ireland. Simon Moore, cutlery historian, 8th September 2012, via email.
- ⁵³ Barnard, *Making the Grand Figure*, 118.
- ⁵⁴ Conor Lucey, 'Classicism or commerce? The town house interior as commodity', in Christine Casey (ed.), *The eighteenth century Dublin town house* (Dublin, 2010) 248.
- ⁵⁵ According to Claire Walsh, pers comm., Helen Clifford has found this evidence.
- ⁵⁶ Walsh, 'Shop design and the display of goods', 172. Quote from Danie Defoe, *The Plain Dealer* (1727).
- ⁵⁷ Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: women's lives in Georgian England* (New Haven and London, 1998); John Styles and Amanda Vickery (eds), *Gender, Taste and Material Culture in Britain and North America, 1700-1830* (New Haven and London, 2007); Maxine Berg and Helen Clifford, *Consumers and Luxury: consumer culture in Europe, 1650-1850* (Manchester, 1999); Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, *Consuming Subjects: women shopping and business in the eighteenth century* (New York, 1997).
- ⁵⁸ *Hibernian Journal*, 12th December 1785.
- ⁵⁹ *Walker's Hibernian Magazine*, February 1790, 190.
- ⁶⁰ John Gamble, *Sketches of History, Politics, and Manners taken in Dublin in the Autumn of 1810* (London, 1811) 79.
- ⁶¹ Just as in Britain at the time. See James Raven, *Judging New Wealth: popular publishing and responses to commerce in England* (Oxford, 1992).
- ⁶² *Dublin Evening Post*, 21st September 1782.
- ⁶³ RIA, MS K 14-15, 330, diary entry for 22nd March 1803.

- ⁶⁴ See Martyn J. Powell, *The politics of consumption in eighteenth century Ireland* (Basingstoke, 2005); Sarah Foster “‘An honourable station in respect of Commerce, as well as constitutional Liberty’”: retailing, consumption and economic nationalism in Dublin, 1720-1785’, in O’Brien and O’Kane, *Georgian Dublin*, 30-44.
- ⁶⁵ See Nancy Cox, “‘Beggary of the Nation’”: moral economic and political attitudes to the retail sector in the early modern period’, in Benson and Ugolini, *A Nation of Shopkeepers*, 26-51.
- ⁶⁶ Raven, *Judging New Wealth*, 197.
- ⁶⁷ Dowling, *Trials at Large*, 130-32.
- ⁶⁸ See J. Hill ‘Religion, Trade and Politics in Dublin 1798-1848’, in Butel and Cullen (eds), *Cities and Merchants*, 248.
- ⁶⁹ RIA, MS K 14-15, 19, vol. 6, entry for 15th October 1801.
- ⁷⁰ *Wilson’s Dublin Directory*, 1801
- ⁷¹ 7 William III, c.5.; 2 Anne, c.6; 8 Anne, c.3.
- ⁷² The Dublin Goldsmiths Company holds quarterage records for the Catholic goldsmiths.
- ⁷³ 17 & 18 George III, c.49; 21 & 22 George III, c.24.
- ⁷⁴ 13 & 14 George III, c.35.
- ⁷⁵ Maureen Wall, ‘The Catholic Manufacturers, Manufacturers and Traders of Dublin, 1778-1782’, *Reportorium Novum*, II, 1, 1960, 300.
- ⁷⁶ Based on cross-referencing the names published by Maureen Wall in 1960 with street directories, newspapers and account books.
- ⁷⁷ Maureen Wall, ‘The rise of a Catholic middle class in eighteenth century Ireland’, *Irish Historical Studies*, XI, 1958, 103.
- ⁷⁸ Barnard, *Making the Grand Figure*, 372
- ⁷⁹ NLI, transcripts of letters to and from William Cope, merchant, MS 1715, vol. I, 149, letter dated 1st August 1788 from W. Cope to S. Toone.
- ⁸⁰ NLI, MS 1715, vol. I, 283. Letter dated 12th April 1793, from Reverend Charles Cope to William Cope.
- ⁸¹ William Cope also blamed the demise of the firm on his having persuaded Thomas Reynolds, a member of the United Irishmen, to turn informer, with the result that Oliver Bond’s house was raided before the planned rising could take place. This emerges from a number of letters in NLI, MS 1715, vol. II.
- ⁸² See Jessica Cunningham, ‘Dublin’s Huguenot Goldsmith, 1690-1750: assimilation and divergence’, in *Irish Architectural and Decorative Studies*, XII, 2009, 158-85.
- ⁸³ David Dickson (ed), *The Gorgeous Mask* (Dublin, 1987) 330.
- ⁸⁴ This seems likely to be Thomas Pim (1771-1855), the founder of Pim Brothers. Thomas Pim married Mary Harvey on 21st day 8th month 1805; certificate is held in Friends Historical Library at Marriage Certificates Box 1, No. 50. See also Genealogical File 60/14.
- ⁸⁵ Margaret Boyle Harvey, 1809-12. Transcript held at Friends Historical Library, Room 4, No. 10, Shelf P, 96-97.